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Mary Anne Angel

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Profile:

Narrator Name: Dr. Mary Anne Angel
Interviewer: Anna Carrera
Author: Anna Carrera
Date of Interview: March 13, 2011

Subject: Oral History Interview with co-founder and co-director of Two Trees, Inc. She discusses her life, activism, and leadership

Key Words:

University of Dayton
Two Trees, Inc.
Circle of Light Program
Servant Leadership
Learning Disabilities
Attention Deficit Disorder
Educational leadership
Multicultural Relationships
Native American

Confessions of a Do-Goode: An Oral History Interview with Dr. Mary Anne Angel
Introduction to Oral History, Dr. Marjorie McLellan, Winter Quarter 2011

On March 13, 2011, I interviewed Dr. Mary Anne Angel at her home on Richland Road in Greene County. We conducted the interview in her upstairs office.

Mary Anne was born in Portsmouth, Ohio on September 10, 1949 to Robert and Anna Lee Scherer. In her interview, Mary Anne says that Portsmouth is part of Appalachia and refers to her cultural identity as white, blue collar, Appalachian and Roman Catholic. Her father was a police officer and her mother was a stay-at-home Mom until the 1970s, when her mother became a nurse and addictions rehabilitation counselor. Mary Anne was the oldest of eight children. She spent much of her childhood and adolescence working in two local churches - St. Monica and Holy Redeemer – and in the Franciscan convent. She also considered joining the Franciscan order. Throughout her life, Mary Anne was exposed to community service and activism through her family, church, and school. For example, her extended family was involved in politics and labor unions, and her church and parochial school was involved in “charitable works”.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Mary Anne intensely followed news coverage about the Civil Rights Movement but was prevented from any real opportunity to engage due to strict social norms within her family and community and her mother’s illness and subsequent diagnosis of cancer when Mary Anne was fifteen years old. Mary Anne first became aware of classism during the Vietnam War when young men who had the resources to go to college were deferred from the draft while most of the young men from her neighborhood were sent to war. Two friends from her immediate neighborhood were killed in the war. In 1967 - the year Mary Anne graduated from high school - a one building community college opened up in Portsmouth, and she attended for two years. She not only threw herself into her studies but was active in theater, chorus, and forensics. At the end of her sophomore year, however, she did not

have the funds or resources to attend a four-year university out of town, so she married her high school sweetheart and started a family. She had three sons and a daughter.

The following years were difficult but happy ones. Mary Anne moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where she finished her bachelor and masters degrees in Communication at the University of Cincinnati. She subsequently taught at the University of Cincinnati from 1977 – 1994 and became a full-time faculty member at the University of Dayton in 1988, where she currently teaches. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership in 1996. Her autoethnographic dissertation juxtaposed her perceptions as a white, Roman Catholic, blue-collar Appalachian with the perceptions of a traditional full-blood Hunkpapa Lakota woman. It also explored themes of collaboration between Native American and mainstream cultures, multiracial feminism, and the development of more personal and feminine models of transformational leadership.

In terms of “activism”, Mary Anne would probably not have ventured far from the conventional box of church and charitable works had it not been for two life-changing experiences.

First Life-changing Event

In the early 1970s, topics such as learning disabilities and special needs were just beginning to be medically and academically explored. At this time Mary Anne’s three sons were diagnosed as gifted but learning disabled and sent into classrooms with educators, who were not properly trained to teach LD students, not properly informed about the new laws, and not properly supported to deal with the influx of LD students who were mainstreamed by legal mandate. To make matters worse, the cruelty inflicted on these LD students by their peers was indescribable.

From 1977 -1996, Mary Anne threw herself into educating herself and others about learning disabilities and the legal rights of special needs students. This later expanded to include Attention Deficit and Bi-Polar Disorders, Tourette’s Syndrome, and addictions in youth and young adults. In 1992-1994 she co-directed the Greater Miami Valley Chapter of Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CH.A.D.D.) and in 1994-96 was a board member, consultant, and grants writer for the Alpha School in Dayton Ohio, a special advisor for academically at-risk and special needs students in the University of Dayton’s Arts and Sciences Dean’s Office, and co-directed a non-profit called Attention Deficit Disorders, Unlimited.

Second Life-changing Event

After Mary Anne’s children graduated from high school, she thought she would settle down to a more conventional life but in the summer of 1999 and 2000, she helped a Native American nonprofit, Wisdom of the Elders, Inc., to film and archive the oral histories of Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota elders. This was her first exposure to the physical and cultural genocide that our country waged against the indigenous peoples of the world. This was her first exposure to the legacy of suffering among Native Peoples that continues to this day. This was her first exposure to how deeply wounded the relationships are between Native and non-Native Peoples – despite the well-intentioned but ineffectual efforts of do-gooders, like herself.

In response to this life-changing event, Mary Anne founded the Circle of Light Program at the University of Dayton in 2001. The purpose of this initiative is to provide opportunities for Native American and other under-represented or marginalized communities to: (1) have voice and visibility;

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(2) build partnerships rather than co-dependent relationships; (3) promote culturally diverse models of education, wellness, and leadership; (4) promote models of service and intercultural interaction that engage individuals and communities as transformational change agents in their own affairs; and (5) deconstruct the “helping”, “fixing”, “rescuing”, and “saving” approach.

Since the Circle of Light’s creation, Mary Anne has coordinated and raised funds for approximately twenty cross-cultural events, including six trips by UD students and adult volunteers to reservations in North and South Dakota. In 2002, she co-produced a documentary video on the life and death of Lakota Rose Madison, a seventeen year old Hunkpapa woman from Standing Rock Reservation, and coordinated the launch of the Lakota Rose Madison Peace Place Initiative at Lakota’s Memorial in Little Eagle, South Dakota.

The Lakota Rose Madison Initiative and associated projects grew so quickly from 2002-2004, that Mary Anne and David Weinkauff co-founded the nonprofit Two Trees, Inc. in 2004 to help them manage the non-UD components of the initiative and projects. As co-directors of Two Trees, Inc. Mary Anne and David have worked with or currently work with the following communities and constituencies:

- University of Dayton
- American Indian Education Center
- American Indian Movement (AIM) Cleveland Chapter
- Dayton International Soroptimists
- Ga-Li
- Hanbleceya House
- Integrated World Arts, Inc.
- Many Voice Singers
- Medicine Bow Forge
- Memories of Africa
- Miami Valley Council for Native Americans
- Miami Valley Juvenile Rehabilitation Center
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- Redbird Center
- Seneca Faithkeepers
- Standing Rock Reservation
- SunWatch Indian Village
- Thistle Industries
- Two Trees, Inc.
- United Way
- Weinkauff Film Productions
- White Bison, Inc.
- Wright State University Native American Student Association

To help build community among Tiospaye (extended family) members, Mary Anne uses a transformational leadership approach, stressing role of leader as one who is: a servant and change agent; a holistic and systems thinker; a facilitator for the development and articulation of communal vision and mission; a team-builder; a back-up plan and Indian-time person, and a Don Quixote.

Oral History Interview

Name of the Project: Confessions of a Do-Gooder: Oral History Interview with co-founder and co-director of Two Trees, Inc. Dr. Mary Anne Angel.

Name of the project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University
Archives or repository

Interviewee/narrator name Dr. Mary Anne Angel

Interviewer name Anna Carrera

Others present

Place 845 Richland Rd. Xenia Ohio 45385 (Upstairs Office of Dr. Angel's home)

Date 03/13/11

Length of recording: 58:51

Original format: digital video recorder

Keywords: University of Dayton

Two Trees, Inc.

Circle of Light Program

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Indexed by Anna Carrera

Index

00:00:00-00:00:42 Introduction to the recording

Information listed above

00:00:42-00:05:38 Experiences growing up

Dr. Angel shares her experiences growing up in Appalachian culture in Southern Ohio. She describes her blue collar and Roman Catholic upbringing leading to her exposure of injustice issues. She describes her father's involvement in the police union and the family's involvement in labor issues and politics.

Dr. Angel also describes how she grew up with a sense of extended family. She describes how her upbringing has shaped her for her service work. Identification from experiencing inequity, discrimination, and exploitation growing up led to her advocacy of marginalized groups.

Key words:Appalacia

Roman Catholic

Injustice

Blue Collar

00:05:38-00:08:14 Other Influential Factors

Dr. Angel describes how the challenge of raising gifted children with learning disabilities affected her path. She says she is an “activist by nature” which became fueled by experiencing her children being denied equal rights to education for issues beyond their control. This led Dr. Angel to become a resource person and advocate for C.H.A.D.D. (Children with Attention Deficit Disorder). She was active in educational reform movements and parent support groups for fifteen years until her focus changed.

Keywords: C.H.A.D.D.

Activist

Education Reform

Support Groups

00:08:14-00:09:45 A Change of Focus

Dr. Angel found out in her forties that she had Native American Heritage. She describes how through her PhD work she began work with Native Peoples in North and South Dakota. She explains the connection she made at this time about what poor people all over the world have suffered. This led to her focus on social justice issues with Native Americans.

Keywords: Native Peoples

Standing Rock Indian Reservation

South Dakota

Dakota and Lakota culture

Exploitation

Dissertation

00:09:45-15:20 A Change in Philosophy

Dr. Angel describes how her philosophy about service and empowerment has evolved over time. She explains how when she began her service, she was very focused on achieving desired outcomes. She wanted to help others and she wanted measurable results. She explains how her mission has shifted to now focusing on success through the journey or “the process”. She describes her current mission about creating long-term reciprocal relationships. She articulates her belief that we are all related, all interdependent on one another, and that community is about family. Dr. Angel elaborates on her view of interconnection and the Butterfly Effect in relationship. She traces her philosophy of community back to her family growing up. She describes the sense of connection her upbringing gave her when she immersed herself in Native culture.

Keywords: Empowerment

Reciprocal Relationship

Codependency

Interdependence

Community

Family

Butterfly Effect

00:15:20-00:26:18 The Creation of Two Trees Inc.: The Mission and the Work

Dr. Angel shares what she learned from Native Peoples that motivated her to want to start a dialogue between Native and Non-Native groups. She speaks about Native history that is not typically a part of mainstream history curriculum. She also describes her work to bring issues into dialogue to start to heal relationship between cultures. She describes the events she has started at the University of Dayton including: cultural exchange trips and outreach programs. Dr. Angel also shares how her personal journey has changed to focus on following an authentic path and doing so with like minded people. She elaborates on what is meant by reciprocal relationship and its importance.

Keywords: Two Trees Inc.

Non Profit

University of Dayton

Native People's Celebration Event

Mission

00:26:18-00:31:58 Meaningful Projects

Dr. Angel reflects on some of the most significant projects she's experienced. She shares her experiences discovering her own stereotypes of the white middle class.

Keywords: Stereotype

Lesson

Cultural Exchanges

University of Dayton

00:31:58-00:45:22 Challenges and Clarity

Dr. Angel shares how empowering others and doing service work has complexity. She describes some of the challenges. She focuses on how creating relationship can be hard if one leads, as Parker Palmer says, an "unexamined life". She explains her approach of always trying to deconstruct ideas about changing others and romanticized outcomes. She focuses on the need to prepare and know herself. She describes the importance of really getting to know those we wish to empower and create relationship with. She compares building relationship to bridge building and believes the first step in building is with dialogue. She speaks about having a balance of talking and listening.

Keywords: Challenge

Expectation

Preparation

Self Awareness

Parker Palmer

00:45:22-00:58:5 The Impact of Service Work: The Journey

Dr. Angel shares the impact her work and the way that she has chosen to follow her personal mission has impacted her life and the lives of her family and friends. She expresses her joy in living a life of fulfillment and recognizes the material wealth she traded it for. She goes on to speak about what her path has gifted to her family. She believes her family has learned passion, deconstruction, questioning, reason, research, compassion, and connection to social justice issues. She also speaks about the amazing people her children have met. Dr. Angel sums up her story by sharing the lessons she has taken away from her work. She focuses on the lessons of: interconnection, right relationship, success in the process, learning discernment, and the importance of finding peace on the journey.

Keywords: Reflection
Meaning
Family

Oral History Interview

Name of the Project: Confessions of a Do-Gooder: Interview with Dr. Mary Anne Angel co-founder and co-director of Two Trees, Inc.

Name of project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University

Archives repository

Interviewee Dr. Mary Anne Angel

Interviewer Anna Carrera

Others Present Place 845 Richland Rd. (home office of Interviewee)

Date March 13, 2011

Length of Recording 00:58:51

Original format: Digital Audio Recording

Transcribed by Anna Carrera

Interview Transcript

Carrera:

This is an interview of Dr. Mary Ann Angel, a professor at the University of Dayton and local Dayton activist and co-founder and co-director of Two Trees Inc., a non-profit organization that focuses on building long-term reciprocal relationships between Native Americans and non-native communities. Interviewed by Anna Carrera. We are exploring the story of Mary Anne's work.

Mary Anne, can you tell me about your experiences growing up?

Dr. Angel:

Well, a lot of people don't realize that you can grow up in Ohio and still live in Appalachia. But, I grew up in the far south eastern corner of Ohio which isn't Appalachia. I grew up Roman Catholic, blue-collar, Appalachian and white. And the funny thing is I thought I was middle class the whole time I was growing up because that is what you see on T.V., you see "Father Knows Best" and "Ozzie and Harriet" but it was only after I left Appalachia that I realized that I actually was blue collar working class, very proud of it. And, how did those experiences affect me? Well, I was given a good education. I was brought up in a Catholic school environment and as part of growing up Catholic we were very sensitized to poor injustice issues in the world. And

my dad belonged to the police union. He was a policeman and he was very involved in labor and politics. He ran for sheriff twice. So, we were always very involved in politics and social justice issues when I was growing up. That had a huge impact on me.

The second thing about growing up that had a huge impact on me is that just like Native Americans have a strong clan system in which they grow up, not like nuclear families but they grew up with a huge extended family and very connected and that's the way I grew up and so when I started to work with Native Americans I was very comfortable with that whole sense of extended family and everybody being related and everybody being connected. And my family's still like that today.

Carrera:

So, you've told me about your experiences growing up and then how that's kind of shaped you. How do you think those experiences have shaped you specifically for the work that you do?

Dr. Angel:

Well, for one thing, if you get into the philosophy of our non-profit and my own personal philosophy, the bottom line is we don't work to, for example, do a clothing drive or build a building. We work to develop long term reciprocal relationships and I think that came, that's not only, like I said a Native perspective, that's definitely an Appalachian perspective. And, I think also the fact that, even though I wasn't aware I was not middle class when I was growing up, we grew up with class, a very big class difference in the town I grew up in and the people who lived, quote "up on the hill", were the people who had money and prestige and I now know that we would call them white collar workers and middle class and upper middle class and I didn't know that's what it was called at the time. The people who lived closer to the river, like us, we were the lower class and there was a huge difference in the way we were treated at school and the opportunities that were given to us and I know that there was a lot of power differences in terms of, the poor were exploited by corporations like, we lived in an area in which there's coal mining and in which the timber companies have come in and taken all the timber and the ecological damage that's the poor people that suffered from that, the flooding and that sort of thing and toxic waste dumps and radioactive uh, we suffered the radioactive fallout from the nuclear power the atomic plant that was nearby. We have suffered a lot of the same things that Native Americans have suffered and so I think these experiences growing up I felt very stigmatized and not accepted and so, I think these experiences, at a later time would make me feel a strong sense of solidarity with Native Americans who have felt many similar things.

Carrera:

That makes sense. What other experiences in, what other experiences in your life do you feel have shaped you for your work?

Dr. Angel:

Ok. Two other experiences, first of all I got married, I had children and three of my children have learning disabilities but their gifted, their gifted with learning disabilities and uh when my, especially when my two oldest were in school, my two oldest sons, they didn't have a lot of research on learning disabilities and that was before children who had learning disabilities had any rights in the class room and I think I was an activist by nature because when my children

were being denied the rights to equal education and they were being punished for things that were found to be physiological not just behavioral problems or attitude problems, they were physiological in nature. When my children were bullied so badly they were actually injured in the schools and the schools wouldn't do anything about it, I became very active. I started doing my own research I co-founded a non-profit at that time. I ran a support group The Dayton Chapter of a national organization called CHAD and ultimately became a resource person and an educational advocate. We went to court. We went to schools and advocated for students after new laws were passed to protect children with learning disabilities. Very active at the beginning of that movement and was active in that movement for 15 years before my focus turned to Native Americans.

Carrera:

So, would you say was that how you first got involved in community issues?

Dr. Angel:

Well, like I said, I think when I was a child through our church and through my family, I was already involved in community sorts of activism. But so this but this as an adult, as an adult this was my first experience on my own becoming very active in terms of movement and advocacy and, and challenging the legal system.

Carrera:

So how did that involvement change over time?

Dr. Angel:

How did the involvement in what, CHAD or?

Carrera:

The involvement in just the community issues and your activism.

Dr. Angel:

If I were going to say how did that change over time because then I found out when I was in my forties I had some Native American blood in me and I was working on my dissertation. I was working on my PHD at the time and so as part of my PHD course work I immersed in a reservation in south Dakota and north Dakota for awhile and it really opened my eyes to all the things historically we were not taught and all the, not just the tragedies historically but even what's going on today and I saw the connection between what has happened to poor people all over the world including Appalachia and Native Americans and so at that point my projectory changed a little bit because my children at that point were then adult children and they were no longer in school and so my projectory changed and then I started focusing on issues in social justice relating to Native Americans but, one thing that changed was I think in my younger years I was very focused on changing the system. Changing people and changing the system and since I've turned fifty years old and I've learned so much, I've learned that what is important to me is the fact that I don't know if I can ever change the system and I know that we can't change other people. But, what I think we can do which can change the world is help to build long term reciprocal relationships between communities of people and particularly communities of people who have this huge chasm between themselves that creates situations of hopelessness and

helplessness and violence and hatred and to me now it's all about building long term reciprocal relationships because I think that's the only way we can really change this the world or change ourselves.

Carrera:

So I hear your saying, you know, this focus on building these this reciprocal relationship and this sense of community. So, can you tell me what does community mean to you?

Dr. Angel:

Ok, Community means that, first of all, everybody is related. It's not just that we are inter-connected, we are inter-connected, it's the whole butterfly affect thing I truly believe at a literal level that everything I do impacts everything else in the world and impacts everyone else in the world. But if we carry that idea of everything being inter-connected a little bit further we are all relatives. Native Americans believe that but honestly I believed that even before I became involved in Native American philosophy and spirituality. And if we are all relatives than this whole idea of, and what was the question again?

Carrera:

What is community mean to you?

Dr. Angel:

Community. Right. So community to me isn't just like, ok, we're going to build a group of people here who are acquaintances and we share some similar things, go do similar things together and it's not even like we're just friends and neighbors. To me it's like we are relatives and so community is like an extended family. Lakota have a word called Tiospaye, which I use a lot and we use a lot in our community but it literally means 'extended family' and it literally means being 'relatives'. It's really interesting when I first was exposed to Native American communities, I uh 'this is my mother' and 'this is my mother' and 'this is my mother' and 'this is my mother' and 'this is my grandmother' and 'this is my grandmother' and like eight grandmothers and I'm starting to say, "How can you have that many grandmothers? That's physically impossible." And, in the Lakota tradition there is a lot of adoption of relatives but the thing is they don't see a biological relative as any different than an adopted relative. And when I would say, "Well, is this your biological relative or your adoptive relative?". They would look at me like 'that was a very strange question, almost like it was a little bit insulting. The point is A Relative is A Relative. To me that's what a community is. It is your family. It is your relatives.

Carrera:

And I heard you say, "that community means that we're all related" and I thought I heard you say that you believed in that philosophy before you actually even entered the Native community. So, can you tell me where that belief or that philosophy came from and does it potentially go back to your family growing up?

Dr. Angel:

First of all as a Catholic I think I was taught that but first of all I just want to do a little disclaimer here. There are some things that the Catholic Church has said that I don't necessarily agree with. Having said that however, I was taught as a Catholic that everybody is brother and

sister and uh and I uh grew up with that and my mother that's how my mother raised me. Uh, they raised me that everybody is our brother and sister. So, really, maybe that's part of Appalachia. Appalachians' have a lot of similarities because they depend upon each another so much and their very clan oriented and I as part of being a Roman Catholic and part of growing up with my own family in Appalachia I was taught that even before I met Native Americans so when I met them it was just like coming home. It was not like a different culture to me. It was like coming home.

Carrera:

You said that you had that in your own family growing up. Do you have siblings?

Dr. Angel:

I have seven siblings. I'm the oldest of eight.

Carrera:

Ok. Alright. So, that really makes sense. Can you tell me a little bit about your work with Two Trees?

Dr. Angel:

I'll tell you a little about how this started and I've mentioned this a little bit before. In my forties I found out I had some Native American ancestry and so when I was finishing my PHD course work I had an opportunity to go to a Native American reservation work for a non-profit there doing oral histories, oral histories of the Lakota, Dakota and the Kota. And they talk about culture shock when you go to another culture, they talk about culture shock and my culture shock was kind of a reverse culture shock. When I met the Native Americans they were so much like the Appalachian culture in many respects that I felt totally at home. But when I found out, now I was an educated person, I was finishing up my PHD course work and I had had two years of public school and the rest of the time had been in K-12 had been private school, good Catholic school. Then I'd been in two years of public high school and I had, like I said I was finishing up my PHD course work. So, I thought I was a pretty educated person. When I went to the reservation and started learning about all the things that weren't concealed in the history books in the literature books what our government had done to Native peoples, indigenous people around the world. What the Catholic church had done. What was still going on, still currently going on uh talk about culture shock. That's the hugest culture shock I ever had and at that time I decided when I go back I just wanted to start to bring these issues to the table. Let's start to talk about this. Because, the relationship between non-natives and Native people in general is very wounded because of what has happened historically and what goes on now and I thought, "Ok. We have to start to talk about this. We have," people don't know about this. People in my culture do not know about this. And so I started wanting to bring that to the table. So, that is really at UD I started doing events. I started a program at UD called Circle of Light. And Circle of Light that is what we did. We started doing events. We started doing cultural exchange trips. We started doing community outreach and it wasn't just in Dayton we were doing this in states and in Canada. So that's how it started but I knew that I would not be at UD for my whole life because I will probably be retiring in about four or five years and I needed something that uh so that when I retired I still had intact my Tiospaye and the people we worked with and our resources and things so I founded the non-profit with Dave Weinkauff. And it's really Circle of

Light except it's separate from UD so that we can we work together now but when I leave UD I can then I can continue the work through the non-profit.

Carrera:

Why do you do the work?

Dr. Angel:

Well, it's changed. It's definitely changed. When I started doing the work I did it because I was a do-gooder. And I wanted to do good charitable work in the world. And if I ever write a book it's going to be, "Confessions of a Do-Gooder.". It's like I saw these horrible things and I wanted to bring them to light and I wanted to put things into motion that would make things better and make changes and I was looking for these tangible outcomes. It's like when you read these books like 'Stand and Deliver' or uh 'Three Cups of Tea' by Greg Mortenson, where they see this terrible thing this problem and they do something and at the end of the book it's like you stand up and cheer because they've built this orphanage or they got these kids to score so high on their ACT's that they were able to go to college. And I will be honest. That is what I was looking for. I was looking for some king of tangible outcome like that was. That would justify all the work I put into it and make the world a better place. As I've grown older, if that happens that's wonderful that's nice that's a good thing. If you can be one small catalyst that helps to create change or whatever but that's not why I do it anymore because I've realized there's an awful lot of people out there who work in the trenches every single day because their called to something. They see something that's wrong or they see suffering and their called to work in the trenches. And that is a journey for them. That's a personal vocation. It's no different than being called to be a priest or a nun or a teacher or whatever. It is it's a spiritual calling. And your called to do that, that is your journey. And, so, what if you don't have that tangible nice little closure at the end? You built the peace place. You saved these people. You created awareness at the collective consciousness at the national level that all these things are going to. What, what if all that's not there? Is it ok, is the most important thing that you were on that journey and you followed your calling the best you could and you worked in the trenches. And that you surrounded yourself with soul mates and like minded people. To me that's where it's at now. That's what it's totally about now.

Carrera:

And do you feel like that puts things into motion that?

Dr. Angel:

I, what happens is that whatever we do, I do believe in the butterfly affect, I think everything we do has this ripple effect. But, I'm not concerned about what the tangible outcome is. And a lot of times we'll never see it in our life time anyway. So, it's really not about that. That that's nice if it happens but it's not about that and it's not why I do what I do.

Carrera:

So, I hear you saying why you've done the work has changed from being a focus on outcome to evolving to a focus on the journey itself

Dr. Angel:

That's right. And the people we walk with. Two things. The journey. The personal journey. I am authentic. I am following my calling in the most authentic way I can and who am I choosing to be my companions in this journey. That's very important too. Who am I walking with? And you have to find like minded people. Like hearted people, soul mates to walk this journey with because I think it's too hard to try to do that journey by yourself. You need them and they need you to be able to stay in the trenches.

Carrera:

So, I've heard you talk a lot about reciprocal relationship in that as potentially a part of your language just that you guys focus on reciprocal relationship. Can you describe a little bit what that means to you?

Dr. Angel:

Right, ok. If I was going to do "Confessions of a Do-Gooder", my first book, a lot of people, now this is one of the things I think I was trained, in terms of my Christian upbringing, that you go do good works for people, charitable works for people. You know, give money to the poor and clothes to the poor and build houses and such and such. That's good. That is really good. That's important. The world needs that. But that is not relationship. That's not relationship. And what happens is if, communities a privilege, meaning privilege, meaning cultural privilege, they have resources and especially if they are the dominant culture. Let's say the middle class, upper middle class. The wealthy. When you consistently, what's the typical scenario is, that you go and do things for people and give things to people but over the long haul is it creates relationships of co-dependency and there is something about people always being on the receiving end where your poor, and whether it's even stated or just implied, "poor you", "poor you", "your suffering so much", "you have nothing", "I'm going to give you this.", "I'm going to do this for you." It creates a certain type of relationship and it's not a healthy relationship. What I feel you have to do is create relationships in which both sides give and both sides receive. Because then it is an inter-dependent relationship. It is not a co-dependent relationship. And I could talk for two hours about all the damage that co-dependent relationships do. So let's just say, "Reciprocity means both sides giving and both sides receiving in long term collaborative respectful reciprocal relationships."

Carrera:

That makes a lot of sense. What are some of the most meaningful projects or events that you've been involved with and why?

Dr. Angel:

Well, we do events every year at the University of Dayton just about raising awareness and community relationship. I had some UD students, University of Dayton students typically are middle class, upper middle class or even wealthy and typically white. And their typically, what we'd consider from privileged backgrounds have a lot of resources but their also very isolated and insulated and a lot of times their exposure to people of color or people from oppressed or disadvantaged communities is this do-gooder thing and once again I'm not judging that. That's a good thing in, in the sense that yeah we need to help people out but it's still has always put them in this role of, "I'm going to do this for you.", "I'm going give this for you." and then they go home and feel good about themselves because they did all this these good things for all these

poor people and all these disadvantaged people. And that's the label, you know? These poor disadvantaged people. "Now I go home and I feel so good about my selves and now I'm going to go get my \$50,000 a year job." I had some UD students come to me and they wanted to take a, this was seven years ago, and wanted to make a trip to South Dakota to the reservation to do "good works" to do a 'service learning' project. And the young woman who approached me, I said, "Mel, I don't do 'service learning' projects and I don't do tourist trips." I said, "The only thing I do is 'long term reciprocal relationships' and if that's not what your into than go find somebody else.". So she went back and she talked to the Alpha Fio Mega students and I couldn't believe it. She came back and she said, "We want to do it. We want to do a long term reciprocal relationship." And I thought to myself, "Oh boy, this is going to last one year. This is going to last one year. These students are going to get out there and they're going to be sleeping in the gym and they're going to be having the toilets over flow on them and their going to have no food and no access to." and I'm thinking, "But I said I would, if they"

Carrera:

You're talking about the reservation? Going out to the reservation?

Dr. Angel:

Yeah, so we took our first trip and I really expected these young people to never ever want to go back again. And to just be very kind of white middle class-ish in the way that they engaged the experience and I was so wrong. These young people were just extraordinary. Extraordinary! And we're doing our 7th trip this year! And the things they have learned they tell me that their lives have been changed. A lot of the students who have graduated a long time ago still go out with us and they still stay in contact. And, oh my gosh, they are such an inspiration to me that it was my stereotype of white middle class college students. That was my baggage and I put that on them and they proved me so wrong. And oh my, I have to say that I'm very honored and very grateful to have had the chance and to have learned how stupid I was about judging people myself.

And the second thing is about Tiospaye, I, I think the greatest gift I've received is I've been a part of building a Tiospaye. We, a Tiospaye is a people, we're a family, we're a family in the trenches and there's people from Canada and uh people from Mexico and people from all over the United States. And we have build this Tiospaye and my PHD was in servant leadership and I've learned a lot about leadership and leadership is about everybody being a leader and being where you need to be. Whether that's in the kitchen making soup or in front of a podium or introducing somebody. Or putting the pieces together so an event can go off or going door to door to get gift certificates or even having the backup plan when everything falls apart. When the speakers don't show up on time and when nobodies prepared and somebody has to have the backup plan so that the audience doesn't know that everything is falling apart. That's what leadership is. Leadership is being a part of the Tiospaye and just being where you need to be when your needed.

And so yup, I would say those are the two most extraordinary things about doing what I do.

Carrera:

Yeah. Thank you. What are some of the challenges that you've faced in your work?

Dr. Angel:

I think two of the challenges, the first one I think is the naivety of people who think they know things and they really don't know anything because when I first started engaging in Native culture and making Native friends and wanting to create a bridge of relationship, long term reciprocal relationship between my culture, which I would call the 'white culture' and 'native culture'. Oh, I had no idea, I had a very naive idea of what it would take and the chasm is this wide. We come from totally different historical places and experiences and per world views and perspectives and the chasm is this big. And how do you even start to bridge that chasm? How do you even start to build that bridge because you have to start from both sides and build towards the middle? It's just mind boggling. So I've really learned a lot. I'm not nearly as naive as I used to be. It is really a big black hole and you get sucked into that black hole and you just think, "Well, you'll never escape." And sometimes you do think it is hopeless. Sometimes you do feel like that and it's like "why am I doing what I'm doing?". But, my daughter Anna said to me, "That you know mom, black holes do suck in everything and they destroy, they can destroy things like solar systems. But they also create. They also rebirth." And it's very interesting the Native Americans have a similar story about the Thunder Beings. The Thunder Beings they come and they bring great devastation and great destruction. They generate chaos. But they have to do that in the Spring so that everything can start anew and everything can be re-borned. So, I would say the first challenge is number one to always be working on that idealistic romanticized naive attitudes we have about what we think needs to happen to bring people together in relationship and how easy that's going to be or if only we would do this. All you can do is just try to prepare yourself and you prepare yourself by getting to know the other and by getting to know yourself. Like I can't believe the people that just want to jump right in to building relationships with other cultures. It could be a Native American culture but it could be another culture Israeli or Muslim or African American but it doesn't matter but they want to jump into "Let's build these lovey-dovey relationships between ourselves and this other culture and all we need to do is this." They have not really taken the time to get to know who this other person is and this other community is and this other culture is deep down. I mean they have this honeymoon relationship with them but they don't know who they are deep down. And, secondly, we don't even know who we are. We think we know who we are but we really don't know who we are and it takes a lot of internal work. People lead unexamined lives you know. Parker Palmer always talks about people who do the most damage in the world are people who think they've got it all figured out. And, they have, they lead very unexamined lives. They don't examine their own lives. They don't know who they are. And so I think the two challenges, and I put do-gooders into this, a lot of times do-gooders with very good intentions do things that have consequences because they really do not have an authentic understanding of the other person. They do not have an authentic understanding of who they are and why they are. And, so, once again it's leading these unexamined lives. And, so, I would say the two, the challenge is "How do we, How do we come to understand the other.". Doesn't mean we have to agree with the other all the time. Doesn't mean we agree with their world views or perspectives but how do we just come to know the other in a deeper sense than just the surface stereotypes. And how do we come to know ourselves. And then how do we use that to start to build the bridge and really you can't start to build the bridge until you start dialogue. People always want to jump in to build the bridge. But you can't build the bridge until you start talking to each other. You have to start to talking to each other and listening to each other. That's the first step. Talking and

listening. That's why, you know, when we do our events, you know, it's not about "Ok lets have people get up and dance and sing and let's try some Native American food." Which we do have performances. It's not, we don't have performances. But I would say the biggest thing is, let's say, ok we need to talk about this. Let's get together and let's talk about this. Let's start the dialogue because where you start to build the bridge is you start to build the bridges by talking to each other and getting to know each other.

Carrera:

Can you tell me how your philosophy about how to empower someone has changed over time?

Dr. Angel:

Right. Yeah, well that's easy. Do-gooder naive person thinks, "What can I do to empower and change somebody?" Ok, we old people who have been in the trenches and the black hole for awhile, you come to understand you cannot change other people. You cannot empower other people. They, people can only change themselves and they can only empower themselves. However, this is what we can do. We can create opportunities. We can create opportunities that perhaps allow people to come together and find resources to change and empower themselves. We can create opportunities in which we start dialogue and ask questions and explore questions together. Which allow us to change ourselves and empower ourselves. And then the last thing is you know, when I was talking about the butterfly effect, I want to re-emphasize, I don't take that metaphorically. I believe in the butterfly effect literally. I believe everything I do affects absolutely everything else for ever and so that means you know if I change myself for the better and if I empower myself essentially that goes out like a butterfly effect and that affects everybody and everything in the universe. And if another person empowers him or herself and changes him or herself in reciprocity that affects everything that goes out to the whole universe and empowers and changes the whole universe including me. So, no, I don't, I know that we can't change and empower anybody except ourselves. But, but by the butterfly effect. That matters.

Carrera:

How has your work impacted your life?

Dr. Angel:

Oh! I'm a heck of a lot poorer than I normally would have been and I know it sounds like I'm saying that tongue-in-cheek but I'm really not. Oh, what I have found is that I had two paths I could have taken because I have a lot of skills that I could have used in corporate America and business and corporate America that I could have really done very well in terms of a career. And I actually chose kind of the social justice spiritual journey. And quite frankly I don't know anybody who chooses that journey and really has a lot of money. Unless you're talking about somebody like uh Tammy Fay Baker and you know some of these evangelists who accumulated a lot of riches through religion but that's certainly the a small minority. Most people who choose to work with social justice or spiritual journey or be in the trenches for the poor or the disenfranchised or whatever. You don't make a lot of money and that's ok. You know Jesus said you can only serve on master and it's true. If you serve money if money is your master you're not going probably be able to do some of these other spiritual things but having said that.

How else has it impacted my life?

So read that again?

Carrera:

How has your work impacted your life?

Dr. Angel:

So, how my work has it impacted my life. The second way it's impacted my life is that I am totally, when I die, I will say, "I did exactly what I wanted to do and I have no regrets and that's huge for me. That's huge. Because until I was forty nine years old I was always doing what everybody else expected of me to do and I wanted to be what everybody else wanted me to be, and I know if I had continued on that course at the moment of my death I would have had huge regrets that I had not been true to my own self. And, I have to say as frustrating as this journey has been I feel so blessed because I'm doing exactly what I want to do and I'm with people I want to be with and I, I just I feel like I was able to follow my calling. I know a lot of people who have a lot of money and great careers and they felt like they never got to follow their calling. They wanted to be an artist or they wanted to be a musician or they wanted to be something else and they never got to follow their calling. And, oh my gosh, I just feel I'm the luckiest person in the world.

Carrera:

And that is huge.

Dr. Angel:

That is huge. And you can only understand how huge it is if you didn't get to follow your calling. And see I was like that till I was forty nine and that's why I appreciate it so much now and I know people who would at the end of their life they, they end their life and they have so much materially and they just felt like they didn't get to follow their heart or their calling or their passion.

Carrera:

I heard you say that you felt you felt like you maybe didn't pursue that calling until you were forty nine. Can you tell me what changed at that point or what, what that means to you?

Dr. Angel:

What changed? I, I think everybody at middle age or maybe not everybody but I'll say most people at middle age, they realize for the first time that they're not going to live forever and that life is finite and I think that some people call it a 'mid life crisis' but I think that, I think mid life crisis are like the Thunder Beings coming into your life or the big black hole. Which, it creates this chaos and de-constructs everything but it bursts, it bursts something. And so I think why was it at 49? I think because I'd had a family but my family at that point, my children at that point were almost adults, they were adults or almost adults and it's like all of a sudden I say, "Ok, do I want to continue like this, living the life that everybody expects me to live or do I want to find myself again. Because really when your living the life that everybody else expects you to lead and if that's not your calling you know, some people are very happy with that but, if if that's

not who you really are, I really felt like I had lost my identity at that point. I didn't know who I was at all and so that's why I think it happened to me at 49. That mid life crisis like I fulfilled my responsibility of raising my children and now I'm going to give myself permission to find myself and follow my calling. But, try and do that in a good way. I, I will tell you I read this article about this woman who I think she had this kind of thing, she had two children. I think they were only like five or something and she just felt like motherhood had deprived her of her identity and time for herself because motherhood is very demanding it's very demanding and so she decided she was going to give up motherhood to pursue her career and her life and find her identity and immerse herself in herself. Which is ok, but so she gave her kids to her husband but I thought to myself, "You know it doesn't have to be either or." I don't, I totally don't get that some people feeling like I either have to be a good mother a good wife a good daughter whatever or it's about me finding myself. I never ever felt it had to be either or I felt you could do both. The problem was until I was forty nine I didn't do both. I only focused on everybody else what everybody else expected and all their demands and things like that. The wonderful part about turning forty nine is I said, "Ok, I got to balance this. I still want to be mother, daughter, wife you know friends sister but not, I have to balance that with a following my own calling and being true to myself. And that's, even though we struggle with that every single day, I struggle with the balance every single day because there's no easy balance every single day. You know, today you're a little low down here and today, next day you're a little up here. But, the point is I have, I, I just feel so good about being able to have both of those gifts in my life. To be able to be myself. To follow my own calling and still I have this wonderful part of me too, which is an authentic part of me too, which is motherhood and being a daughter, being a sister, being a wife, being, being a friend.

Carrera:

How do you feel like the work that you do has impacted your family?

Dr. Angel:

I think it has impacted my family a lot and I think it has impacted my family. It is true that they've sacrificed for me to be my quirky self and to be in this black hole. They've sacrificed certainly. Because I'm not always available to them and but what is also true is that I think they have learned to be very compassionate human beings. They have learned to de-construct, like they don't take things at face value. Like what's in the media, if the government says something and I'm not saying anything, this is not a judgment about the government. This is any authority figures so let me say authority figures. They've learned de-construct messages. To question. To do their own research. To reason. To be compassionate for those who are marginalized. To care about social justice issues. And a lot of times they've been a part of what I do. One of the neatest things is the people I have met along the way. That, because I told you I think it is very important who we share the journey with. One of the kinds of people I share my journey with are the kind of people I share my journey with, I expose those to my children to my family and it's like I am very proud to say that every person that I have shared with my family I am so proud and honored to have my children have met them and for them be a role model for them and I, I could've, I could have taken the other route where material things were the most important. I think material things are important. I've worked my whole life. I've paid my bills. I have a home. I have a car. I don't want it to come off saying that material things are bad because they aren't. A good job is a very good thing. Having food on the table and paying the bills is a very

good thing. But, what I'm trying to say is that, you know I could have chosen to really emphasize material success and material accumulation with my children and I'm really glad I didn't. I'm really glad that they saw what was important to me and they met the people who I loved and then they can take what that and do what they want to with that.

Carrera:

So what do you think what lessons do you take away from your work?

Dr. Angel:

Ok, I actually wrote this down. Some of this I think you've already heard before so this is going to be a repetition I think. First of all, that everything is connected. Absolutely everything is connected. And uh when we say that everything is connected we've already talked about the fact that that means I can't change or empower somebody else but you know, me along with other people we can create environments that are conducive to people being able to change and empower themselves. You know, just by examining our lives and questions and sharing our resources and things like that. And that everything I do to myself and for myself you know that impacts everything else. Secondly, that it's all about right relationship and in right relationship doesn't even mean that we all have to be the same or that we all have to agree. Especially doesn't mean we have to agree and see things the same way. But you can disagree with somebody. But do that in a way that is in right relationship. You know I can listen to you respectfully and I can value you as a person and I can value your right to have the opinions and beliefs and values you have, without agreeing with you. But that is being in right relationship. And there is, when I say right relationship and being related, being relatives, I do mean, I don't just mean human beings. I mean all of nature. I mean all of the universe. I mean even the spiritual realms. Because I believe in that you know. I believe in being in a right relationship with yourself. The right relationship with the great mystery however you define that and all the spiritual beings uhm and helpers and guides that we have. I've already said that one of the lessons I've learned is that at the beginning it was all about tangible outcome. It was just going to be this inspirational motivational redemptive thing at the end which would justify all the suffering and the hard work and the challenges and frustrations and heartbreaks and you know no it is not I can honestly say it's not about tangible. If those things happen it's great don't get me wrong but no. It's truly about the journey. It's truly about who you make the journey with. It's truly about being authentic to yourself and authentic to your calling. And being able to discern you kind of developing that sense of discernment. One of the things I was going to say is I've always been the person who thought it was the journey was from A to B and that a really good planner. You're just, if you're just like a really good planner and you educate yourself and everything you can like you can just make this great journey from A to B. One of the lessons I've learned is that the journey never goes from A to B. And the journey has these detours and tangents and forks in the road and and so that's ok and that's ok because that's part of the journey. Now one thing that is interesting is that as part of your own spiritual development you do want to try to develop a gift of discernment because really I think what's in here is your best guide and you can call that God. You can call that your authentic self. I don't know how people want to frame that but deep inside of here is something that if you listen to it it's going to tell you when to take that fork in the road or when to just stay on the straight and narrow but. Sometimes you do have to discernment about, is this detour fork in the road is this part of my journey or is this a distraction from my journey. And sometimes part of the journey is figuring out what's the

distraction and what's really truly a part of my journey, so that's part of the journey too you know.

But, I will tell you the journey doesn't go from A to B but can you be ok with that? Can you be ok with that? Can you not be afraid? Can you not be frustrated because here you thought you were going to end up at B in five years but you didn't end up at B in five years? Can you be ok with that? And, as part of that too that lesson is that everything is as it should be. Everything is as it should be. I truly believe that. It doesn't mean that's easy. It doesn't mean that I don't resent it sometimes and I don't get angry and frustrated and say, "No, no this is't what I want." But ultimately I do believe everything happens for a reason we are where we're supposed to be at any given moment in time. We are doing what we're supposed to be doing. Where we are we are supposed to be. And so part of our job is to say, "Well since I'm here doing what I'm doing then maybe I just need to come to an awareness of why I am here doing what I need to do right now at this moment at this place on the journey.

I think that's it.

Carrera:

Thank you for your time.